

Statement by
U.S. Representative Tom Allen
“Federal Budget Choices Threaten Our Children’s Futures”
Press Conference at Catherine Morrill Day Nursery
July 11, 2005

Thank you all for joining me this morning to discuss pending federal budget decisions that I strongly believe will compromise the health, education and future of Maine’s children.

I want to express my appreciation to Paulette Grondin-Cardillo, the staff and everyone associated with Catherine Morrill Day Nursery for welcoming us here today. We all benefit from the extraordinary job they do every day nurturing the young children placed in their trust.

I chose this setting because the children now playing in the background will become the adults who comprise Maine’s workforce 15 to 20 years from now.

Choices we make today will enlarge or diminish the opportunities they will have, the contributions they will make to our businesses and communities and the quality of life we and they will enjoy when they grow up.

As adults, we have a moral responsibility to protect our nation’s children from harm, to give them a healthy start in life, and to create opportunities for their personal growth. That is an obligation we share as citizens, not just as parents. Civilized societies can grow and prosper only if they take care of their children.

Late last month, House Republicans pushed through an appropriations bill that grossly underfunds health, education, child care and other programs vitally important to Maine families. They did it because for them maintaining or increasing support for our children was a lower priority than protecting tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans.

I serve on the House Budget Committee and fought earlier this year for a budget resolution that would have provided more funding for families.

To put a human face on the impact the Republican budget choices will have

on Maine's families and communities, I have invited the three people standing here beside me to tell you why these budget decisions are important to them. After they have spoken, I will close by telling you what I and all who care about children need to do in the weeks and months ahead.

Paul Farrell is a student at Southern Maine Community College. Soon he will complete his work at SMCC and enter the University of Southern Maine. I know Paul because he has worked as an intern in my office. Paul will be among the first wave of students who have benefited from the revolutionary innovations in higher education made by Governor Baldacci and the Maine Legislature. The transformation of Maine's technical schools into affordable, accessible and educationally exceptional community colleges has opened the doors of opportunity for Paul and thousands of other Mainers.

[Paul Farrell speaks]

Kelly Tukey is a teacher at Biddeford Primary School. Each day she plants the seeds of knowledge and cultivates the learning skills of the boys and girls in her class. Tens of thousands of children across Maine are fortunate to have teachers like Kelly to help them learn.

[Kelly Tukey speaks]

Ethan Boxer-Macomber is the father of two. His son, Silas, attends Catherine Morrill Day Nursery. Ethan knows that quality, affordable child care is a necessity not a luxury. He values the peace of mind that comes with knowing that while he is at work, Silas is safe and receiving excellent care from Paulette and the staff here at Catherine Morrill.

[Ethan Boxer-Macomber speaks]

I want to thank Paul, Kelly, Ethan and Silas for sharing their stories and their concerns with us this morning

Perhaps our greatest challenge as a country in the next 30 years is to maintain a vibrant and competitive economy at a time when globalization and technology make it easier for other countries to compete with us for jobs and resources.

We must invest in America's children to give them the opportunity for success and to strengthen our competitive position in the global economy.

The bill House Republicans passed to fund the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education next year shortchanges Maine and America's children. It fails to devote the funds for education, health and adult supervision needed to launch them on the path to a bright and promising future. It reflects a bankrupt vision for America, one that values tax breaks for today's wealthy over safer, healthier, better educated children.

Two federal education laws impose costly mandates on state and local governments: President Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) special education law. NCLB requires the cumbersome and inflexible rules and procedures that Kelly described. For FY2006, the bill provides \$13.2 billion less than NCLB promised and \$3.9 billion less than promised in the 2004 IDEA Improvement Act. It cuts NCLB funding from FY2005 funding levels by \$806 million and reduces the federal share of IDEA funding from 18.6 percent in FY2005 to 18.1 percent next year.

Under this Republican bill, Maine will receive \$56 million less than promised by NCLB and \$67 million less than promised by IDEA.

The bill also eliminates, cuts or flat funds teacher training, after-school programs, grants for schools in poor, rural areas and a variety of other education initiatives. It cancels \$125 million appropriated last year for the President's community college proposal. The cost of a four-year college education has increased by \$2,300 since 2001, but this bill increases Pell Grants by a measly \$50.

Overall, this bill shuts down or slashes dozens of programs that successfully enable young people to overcome barriers to the education they will need to become productive, prosperous citizens.

As Ethan so clearly stated, there is no higher priority than the health, education, safety and encouragement of our children.

Kids who don't receive proper health and child care when they are young are less likely to do well in school and grow up to be healthy, successful adults.

This bill cuts \$24 million from Maternal and Child Health block grants and reduces the budget for the Healthy Start prenatal and infant care initiative by five percent. Since 2002, the cost for the full series of recommended childhood vaccines has risen by 38 percent, but federal funding to purchase these vaccines has increased by only about 1.5 percent. Since 2002, the cost of child care has increased by 13 percent, but this bill freezes funding for Child Care block grants at 2002 level for the fourth straight year.

Kelly, Paul and Ethan have helped me illustrate the Republicans' catastrophic, misplaced priorities.

These are not funding decisions that have the best interest of our children in mind. They are the logical consequences of decisions to opt for irresponsible tax cuts for the wealthy in 2001 and 2003 instead of middle class tax cuts that could stimulate the economy without exploding federal deficits.

These are not public policies that will assure tomorrow's workers have the knowledge, skills and capacity needed to strengthen our nation's competitive edge in the global economy.

These are not the choices our parents and grandparents- the legendary "Greatest Generation" - made with respect to us.

The battle isn't over yet. All Maine people who care about children should speak out against these budget choices that weaken our competitiveness by withdrawing support from our children.

It's not too late to reorder our priorities to reflect the values that have made America the most successful and prosperous nation in history. There is still time to pass an appropriations bill that invests in America's youth to assure America's future.

I will continue fighting to put our children first. And I know I am not alone.